



King County

RURAL ECONOMIC STRATEGIES CODE CHANGES

Below is a summary of the rural code changes proposed by King County Executive Ron Sims to the Metropolitan King County Council today.

Resource Based Activities and Animal Care

Farmworker Housing

Many farms in King County are now large enough operations to require workers year-round, but existing regulations allow no more than two accessory dwelling units and require the farmer to live on the farm. The proposed ordinance increases the number farm worker housing units based on the size of the farm. It also eliminates the requirement that the farmer also live on the farm, which is often impractical.

Animal Specialty Service

This change will allow animal services, such as dog day care and animal shelters, as a stand-alone business in the rural area through a conditional use permit. Smaller day cares for dogs as a home occupation will continue to be allowed as a permitted use.

Retail Nurseries

Currently, retail nurseries are classified along with building, hardware and garden stores. This change creates a separate category for retail nurseries and would allow them as permitted uses in the rural zones with the retail sales area limited to 3,500 square feet. The sales area limit does not apply if sales take place in a King County designated historic building.

Agricultural Product Sales

One of the greatest opportunities for farmers to expand their income is to sell their products directly to the consumer. This change will allow the floor area devoted to sales of agricultural products to be up to 3,500 square feet as a permitted use. The sales area limit does not apply if sales take place in a King County designated historic building.

Manufacturing of Food and Kindred Products

Value-added products, such as jams, baked goods, and salsas, create another opportunity for farmers to expand their business. This change will allow the floor area devoted to agricultural processing to be up to 3,500 square feet as a permitted use. On agriculture zoned properties 35 acres or larger, this limit is increased to 7,000 square feet. The production area limit does not apply if the operation takes place in a King County designated historic building.

Wineries and Breweries

King County provided the opportunity to establish a winery in the rural and agricultural zones in 2003. Farmers are now making cider and other fruit-based alcoholic beverages for sale at local farmers markets. Additionally, the county has farmers interested in

growing grapes on south-facing slopes with the plan to make wine in the future. This change would bring the winery provisions in line with the manufacturing requirements for other agricultural products.

Forestry Thinning

This change would promote the health of a forest by allowing forest thinning within aquatic areas, wetlands, steep slopes and in wildlife areas without imposing a six-year moratorium on development. The thinning must be consistent with a conversion option harvest plan and a county approved forest management plan.

Home Occupations and Home Industries

(Includes Executive's recommendations for changes to a home-based business ordinance proposed by the council's Growth Management and Natural Resources Committee).

Indoor area devoted to home occupation

Many home businesses use accessory buildings for part of their business, such as an office or a treatment room. Existing regulations limit the use of these accessory buildings to storage. The committee's amendment would allow unlimited use of accessory buildings for the home occupation, which proved to be a concern to many of those who commented on this proposal. The Executive is proposing to allow these accessory buildings to be used for all activities related to the home occupation, but to limit the floor area that may be used for business purposes based on the size of the lot.

Outdoor area devoted to home occupation

Existing regulations allow use of outdoor areas for home occupations in RA zones, but limits the area to one percent of the lot, up to a maximum of 5,000 square feet, and requires these outdoor storage areas to be screened. The committee modified the allowable area by establishing a minimum outdoor area and then increasing that allowable area in increments based on lot size. The committee also recommended eliminating the screening requirement. The screening requirement received considerable support in public comments and Sims' proposal would retain it.

Number of employees

Sims supports the committee's change to increase the number of non-resident employees on site, but suggests adding a clarification that the limit is for all employees reporting to the site regardless of whether they are full time or part time employees. The proposed amendment also clarifies the status of employees who never visit the premises of the home occupation. Since they have no impact on the surrounding property, there is no reason to limit their number.

Services to patrons

The Executive is proposing that patrons to home occupations be required to make an appointment, consistent with the existing code. King County heard concerns from the public regarding increased traffic to-and-from the business in these predominately residential zones if patrons were not required to arrive by appointment.

Parking

Home based businesses need to provide sufficient parking for non-resident employees visiting the site. Sims included changes to ensure that additional parking is available if there is more than one non-resident employee.

Sales

Consistent with the existing code, the Executive proposes that sales be limited to patrons by appointment or by mail order, telephone, and internet sales with delivery to off-site locations. The committee's amendment would have limited what home occupations are allowed to sell. There were some concerns from the public that this change would have unnecessarily restricted the kinds of businesses allowed as home occupations.

Vehicles

The Executive agreed with the committee that a home business owner needs more flexibility in determining individual business equipment needs, but had concerns with the impact this equipment can have on surrounding neighbors. The committee recommended that an increasing number of vehicles be allowed as part of the home occupation based on the size of the lot. Experience with the existing limitations has shown that these types of regulations are difficult to implement. The Executive is proposing to eliminate existing limits on the number and size of vehicles and heavy equipment allowed on a lot. In the place of limits on vehicles, his proposal would require business vehicles to be parked or stored in the outdoor storage areas or indoor areas devoted to the home occupation.

Home Industries

The committee proposal and the changes the Executive recommends make it easier to operate a home occupation in King County. These proposed changes begin to blur the line between a home occupation, which is a permitted use, and a home industry, which is a conditional use. Therefore, the Executive proposes corresponding changes to the home industry classification. He suggests that the amount of floor area of accessory buildings and the amount of outdoor area devoted to the home industry be established through the conditional use. Sims is also proposing to increase to five the number of non-resident employees allowed in a home industry.

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